

wrote, "A few years ago, Sonny took time out of his schedule to talk with me about working in politics. I walked away from that evening knowing Sonny loved his job meeting and working for all Nebraskans and representing Gov./Sen. NELSON. I'll never forget his guidance, career advice and passion for his job."

What was an everyday meeting for Sonny made a lasting impression on this young man. Sonny had that affect on people.

I will be the first to admit that I wouldn't be standing here today after 15 years in elective office without Sonny. He had a political sense unmatched in Nebraska. He heard the rumblings long before the storms. He didn't need to poll anyone to determine the mood of the people. He just knew. His instincts were right on. And that's why people sought his opinion and listened when he spoke.

Mrs. Foster described the last time she was with Sonny as being "jolly." Have I mentioned that laugh? Sonny filled the room with his presence and his persona. It overflowed when he laughed that unique, infectious belly laugh. No one enjoyed a practical joke more than Sonny, except maybe me! I think Mrs. Foster will forever keep that wonderful memory of Sonny and by sharing it with all of us has given us a gift we should cherish.

Thank you Sonny, for all you did for me, for my family, and most important, for the State of Nebraska. The "good life" will not quite be the same without you.●

CELEBRATING THE OPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED CAMPUS

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I rise to recognize the opening of the University of California, Merced, the first new University of California campus in 40 years.

The University of California, Merced is the 10th campus in the University of California system, widely renowned as one of the finest public university systems in the world. Merced, located in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley in Central California, was selected as the site of the new campus in 1995 after a thorough and competitive screening process that took 7 years and involved more than 80 different locations.

The 1,000 students in the inaugural 2005 class are a shining example of the diversity that is a great strength of California. Students from Del Norte to San Diego, and from the Pacific Coast to the Sierra Nevada, make up the diverse student body population. A significant number of the students are the first in their families to attend college and come from underrepresented ethnic or racial minority groups in the Central Valley.

The University of California, Merced will grow steadily in the coming years. Initially, the university will offer major degrees in nine different majors

from three disciplines: engineering, natural sciences, and social sciences, arts and humanities. Graduate degrees in the three major disciplines will also be available. Total enrollment is expected to reach 5,000 in 5 years and reach 25,000 in 2035. The number of academic programs and degree offerings will increase accordingly as the university grows.

The students, faculty, and staff of the inaugural UC Merced class deserve special praise for their vision as they take on the responsibility of building and expanding the 10th University of California to one that will some day be steep in tradition, history, and excellence. In due time, the students, faculty, and the staff of the first UC Merced class will be rightfully seen as pioneers to those who will follow in their path in the years and decades to come.

The opening of the University of California, Merced is made possible by the tireless work and dedication of scores of committed public officials, hard-working professionals, and determined citizens. Every person who has lent a helping hand to the UC Merced campus can take great pride in knowing that their hard work has resulted in greater opportunities for future generations of California students.

I congratulate the University of California, Merced on its opening, and wish its faculty, students and the community a bright future as they help make the Central Valley and California an even better place to live.●

CHARLES CITY, IOWA, REVITALIZATION

● Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, one of the greatest challenges we face—not just in Iowa but all across America—is preserving the character and vitality of our small towns. This is about economics, but it is also about our culture and identity. After all, you won't find the heart and soul of Iowa at Wal-Mart or Home Depot out in the strip malls. No, the heart and soul of Iowa is in our family farms, and on Main Street in small communities all across my State. That's why we need to be as generous as possible—and creative as possible—in keeping our downtowns not just alive but thriving.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am involved in funding many hundreds of programs every year. But the Main Street Iowa program—providing challenge grants to revitalize downtown buildings across my State—is in a class by itself. It's smart. It's effective. And it touches communities and people in very concrete ways.

For example, the citizens of Charles City, IA, are revitalizing their downtown and inspiring new interest in fine arts. Charles City received a Main Street Challenge Grant to construct an elevator addition to the Charles City arts center, which is housed in a historic, city-owned building that was

originally a Carnegie Library. This elevator installation is the first phase of a project called "Expanding Accessibility to the Arts," which aims to increase the number of people who can experience the programs and services offered by the arts center. The next steps in the plan are to refurbish the building's workshop and classroom areas to provide wheelchair access and eliminate sources of allergic reaction, and to expand the arts center exhibits and programs to meet the needs of the entire community.

This Carnegie Library building has been the cultural center of the Charles City community since it was opened to the public in 1904. When much of the downtown was devastated by a tornado in 1968, the Carnegie building was miraculously spared. In 2004, the Carnegie Library celebrated its centennial anniversary.

The addition of an elevator, plus other changes to improve access for people with disabilities, will help to equip the Carnegie Library building for its next 100 years. As the principal author of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I am heartened to see more and more of our old, historic buildings being retrofitted to improve access for citizens with disabilities.

The beauty of the Main Street Iowa program is that the ideas and initiatives come from our small towns and rural communities. I have been pleased to secure \$1.5 million in funding since 2002 for Main Street Iowa Challenge Grants. The Iowa Department of economic development provides technical assistance, but, as we have seen in Charles City, success itself comes from local leadership, local teamwork, and home-grown ideas and solutions.

This project is demonstrates how renovations of old buildings can serve to jumpstart broader civic improvements. When people see one of the anchors of Main Street being renovated or expanded, this can change the whole psychology of a town or community. It offers hope. It serves as a catalyst for a far-reaching ripple effect of positive changes.

So I congratulate the citizens of Charles City for putting together a winning proposal to secure a Main Street Challenge Grant. Their efforts to reinvigorate the city's historic downtown and improve access for people with disabilities are setting a terrific example for other small towns across America—and for that, I salute them.●

ADEL, IOWA, REINVIGORATION

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